

(Vice Regal Mansion) CASA RONQUILLO
San Elizario, Texas.

HABS No. Tex-3110

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**ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...**

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Texas-3

Historic American Buildings Survey
Bartlett Cocke, District Officer
618 Maverick Bld., San Antonio, Texas.

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ADDENDUM FOLLOWS...

VICE-REGAL MANSION San Elizario, El Paso County, Texas.

Owner: Mrs. Leigh Clark, 1214 E. Vandell Blvd., El Paso, Texas.

Date of Erection: Approximately 1683

Architect: Unknown

Builder: Unknown

Present Condition: Fair

Number of Stories: One

Materials of Construction: Adobe blocks, plaster, stucco, wood beams and wood roof construction.

Other Existing Records: Unknown

Additional Data:

Don Castaneda's Vice-Regal Mansion is just in the rear of the Mission Nuestra Señora del Pilar y el Glorioso Joseph, and was built about 1683. The old adobe mansion contains eleven rooms, built in a Mexican style surrounding three sides of a patio. The fourth side of the patio is enclosed with a thick adobe wall, which served as a protection against the Indians.

Painted on the walls of the Governor General's Audience Chamber is an emblem of pomp and power, "The Tree of Justice," a painted tree on a dried mud wall. A great tree, dark and spreading, Don Juan de Castaneda had this tree painted on the north wall of this throne room, and there it still spreads its branches, apparently unchanged in 250 years. The throne room of the old house is today very much like it was originally. Unfortunately a fireplace has been cut right into the heart of the main trunk of the tree.

Exterior stucco is a dirty white; exterior woodwork is green. Brick coping at top of light red brick. Exterior has been worked over considerably. Patio is fully planted and developed; extremely attractive. Canvas ceiling in Entrance Hall and Audience Chamber painted in a stencil design; colors good; too bright to be very old. "The Tree of Justice" in Audience Chamber is dark green and brown; technique quite crude. A wainscoting extends around this room, consisting of tree limbs, trunks, etc., in same color scheme as main tree on North wall.

Roof is flat. Roof construction typical of locality, consisting of cottonwood logs, saplings and thatch covered with adobe

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of cottonwood logs, saplings and thatch covered with adobe mud. Method of handling change in direction of framing timbers on porch quite unique and interesting. Rooms of different colors; apparently recently repainted. Credit is due Mrs. Leigh Clark, El Paso, Texas, for much of this information.

Author: Lawrence Cocks
Bartlett Cocks, Dist. Officer

Date: December 10, 1936.

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

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Casa Ronquillo (Viceroy's Palace)
Block 31, Track 10B
San Elizario
El Paso County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3110

Addendum to

Viceregal House (El Palacio)
San Elizario
El Paso County
Texas
in HABS Texas Catalog (1974)

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PHOTOGRAPHS
HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. TX-3110

CASA RONQUILLO (Viceroy's Palace)

An Addendum to
Viceregal House (El Palacio)
San Elizario
El Paso County
Texas
in HABS Texas Catalog (1974)

Location: San Elizario, Block 31, Tract 10 B, approximately
.099 acres, located two blocks southeast of San
Elizario Plaza.

USGS San Elizario Quadrangle, Universal
Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
13.379320.349790.

Present Owner: El Paso Landmarks, Inc. (August 30, 1980).

Present Occupant: Presently unoccupied.

Present Use: None.

Significance: The Casa Ronquillo, in its original state,
constituted an important example of a large
"estancia". Its architecture is typical of the
Mexican border region, consisting of adobe walls
without foundations, dirt floors, a (terrado)
roof made of dirt and supported by round beams
(vigas).

The original plan included an interior courtyard
(patio) with a surrounding open porch (portal),
and dependent farm buildings, all enclosed by an
adobe wall.

The interior finishings are not well known except
for the murals and ceiling cloths which seem to
have been of particular quality.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date - Unknown, before 1859, possibly before 1832.
2. Original and Subsequent Owners - The title to the property has
been traced to the period of 1828-1832. Don Jose Ignacio
Ronquillo of San Elizario bought a tract of land from Damien
Montes (or Montez) on December 5, 1828, and on February 26, 1831,

Martin Sambrano, calling himself the Company Commander of the Presidio, stated that his mother (Josefa Sanchez de Fagle) had sold a piece of land to Ronquillo. Neither deed contains any mention of a house. In 1832, Don Jose Joaquin Guttierres

(Guttierrez), also of San Elizario bought one tract of cultivated land from P. Jose Ignacio Escajeda for 28 pesos. This deed is dated February 1. On September 30th of the same year, two of the heirs of Don Rafael Corona, also of San Elizario, Mariana Saeno (Saens, Saenz) of El Paso and Eulogio Saens of San Elizario, acting as his brother's agent, sold their shares of the "house and orchard" they had inherited from their "deceased Grandfather (Corona) to Don Jose Joaquin Guttierres", and on October 8, Jose Olivares (Alivares) sold his deceased wife's share of this house and orchard to Guttierres. Only the deed of sale by Eulogio Saens has a recorded price, namely 50 pesos. On October 7, 1832, the same week as the other transaction, Guttierres put up as security his house, orchard, and contiguous land against a loan of 250 pesos from Jose Ignacio Ronquillo to be repaid the following year. It would seem that this debt was never repaid and that Ronquillo took over the house and lands, for in a document dated April, 1869, Ronquillo's son, Estanislao, refers to the 1832 documents as his father's title to the land. Estanislao certifies that in his father's will (dated 1859) the elder Ronquillo left his house and orchards to his minor daughter Filiberta, and that following the former's death in 1860, she took title to what was listed in the inventory of his death as "one house of good size, with thirteen full rooms, a patio, a portal, a large corral, and a lot of land and orchard contiguous thereto which is surrounded with a fence (tapia) and also various fruit trees, valued at \$1330.00". This is the earliest description of the house itself. The same document of 1869 refers to the "instruments of sale of this house and part of the land on which an orchard was afterwards placed." Filiberta Ronquillo and her husband, Juan Armendaris subsequently sold the entire property to Charles E. Ellis, although it is unclear whether this took place in 1865 or in 1869, due to conflicting documents often not recorded until many years after the fact. After Charles Ellis' death in the "Salt War" of 1877, his widow Theodora Ellis (ne Teodora Alarcon de Juarez) retained title to the property although much of Ellis' other holdings seem to have been disposed of to offset heavy debts. A court decision of 1878 gave the property to Teodora as "widow's homestead" in addition to \$1,000. Although she originally held title to as much as 700 acres of land, the inventory of her estate in 1908 showed only 1/2 acre lot in the town and 9.46 acres on which the house stood. The homestead was sold at public auction by her administrator, Abraham Molina, to Seth B. Orndorff for \$1,250. In 1910, Leigh Clark and his wife purchased the property from Orndorff, apparently as part of a larger land swap which involved lands owned by the Clark family in the town of El Paso. In 1944,

the title passed to Frank A. Smith and his wife from Clark's widow. Myra P. Smith, in turn, sold the property to Jesus Levario in 1949. In 1968, Levario divided the property, selling a .099 acre lot to El Paso Landmarks, Inc., with the existing five rooms of the house. The land on which the greater portion of the house stood is now a cotton field.

3. Original Plans and Construction - The house as late as 1936 (when photographed by HABS), contained twelve rooms in three wings surrounding a courtyard (patio) with an adobe wall completing the fourth side. No contemporary architectural drawings of the house exist today, if indeed they ever did. However, a conjectural floor plan and set of elevations were made in 1966 by local architect Charles Ewing Waterhouse, based upon his own recollection of the structure, interviews with a former resident and the HABS photographs of 1936. Mr. Waterhouse also made careful drawings of the existing structure including many details which are now lost due to vandalism. Mr. Waterhouse's plan has been basically corroborated by other former residents and a plan based on his plan is included here. Although no traces of them remain, there were two painted canvas ceiling cloths. The one in the entrance hall (zaguan) represented conventional and patriotic themes (photographed in 1936 by HABS). The other one was in the large living room (sala), with a large roundel in the center of the ceiling and represented two angels supporting Ezekiel's wheel on a ribbon surrounded by other angels and cherubs. It was painted in bright colors. At the corner of the ceiling cloth, the branches of several large trees painted on the wall extended onto the ceiling. The walls of the large living room were renowned for their murals, in particular, the large group of large trees occupying one wall. These are clearly shown in the 1936 photographs as is the painted wainscoatings along two adjacent walls showing a fence of tree stumps and branches.

An arcade or portal surrounded the patio on two sides, although there is disagreement between the sources as to the materials and configuration of the posts which supported it. One source claims they were of adobe while another gives a most specific description of them as cottonwood limbs, stripped of their bark. An adobe wall connected the entire complex which included the stables, doubly separated from the living quarters by a second adobe wall and gate. An irrigation ditch from the canal to the west of the property originally ran through the patio for use in watering plants (which included a grape arbor in addition to rose bushes). The property also included orchards (there were still fifteen pecan trees in 1944) and a small house of only three rooms some yards to the rear of the main house, but outside the walls.

4. Alterations and Additions - All but five rooms (one wing) of this house have disappeared, and the only remaining trace of them is a part of the wall to the carriage house which serves as a buttress along one wall. According to Mrs. Haygood, the other wings disappeared in a gradual process which was begun even before her parents bought the house in 1944. At that time she says the three rooms to the rear were already unusable, the stables were ruined, and the small house behind the main complex was reduced to its foundations. The possible cause of this destruction was serious flooding combined with neglect, causing deterioration and the eventual collapse of these portions. The other rooms deteriorated and gradually disappeared over the period from 1949 to 1963, although Mrs. Haygood was unable to recollect the precise dates for each stage of the collapse. All fire-places (which were in any case probably not original to the structure) and a small gas heater in one bedroom have been removed. These had been placed in the house before 1944. All that remains of the ceiling cloths or the carved wooden slats which held them are the moldings that attached the slats to the walls. The existing door from the sala to the bedroom is not original. A 1959 photograph shows the doorway with a wide wooden surround. In a 1963 photograph, this surround is missing and a more decorative painting of a different pattern is visible. This painting was evidently cut into when the doorway was placed in that part of the room. It is probably that this painting, of which very little is visible, dates from an earlier period than the tree murals. None of the murals survives today, having gradually disappeared from 1959 to the present. Since 1959, when at least part of the building was still being occupied as a tenement, all the doors, windows, and shutters have disappeared. The old floor of wooden slats over dirt have been replaced with one of poured concrete by the current owner.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure.

One of the earliest owners of the house, if not the first, was Jose Ignacio Ronquillo. Ronquillo was a man of great wealth and importance in the El Paso valley, having served many times as "alcalde" in the town of San Elizario (c.1835). This position would have given him a considerable measure of control over all the valley settlements, San Elizario being the most prominent at the time. (Timmons interview). His son-in-law, Juan Armendariz, was also a man of wealth and position who apparently owned a large portion of neighboring Socorro. The best known of the Ronquillo house's owners

was Charles Ellis and his name is frequently associated with the house. Ellis was a well to do merchant in San Elizario with considerable land holdings. He was shot during the "Salt War" of 1877. Many people believe the house to have been constructed for Ellis, and it would seem certain that he made changes to it. After Theodora Ellis' death, Jose Antonio Escajeda and his family rented the house from Judge Leigh Clark, a local official who had recently purchased it. Escajeda was also locally prominent. Antonio Escajeda was born in San Elizario in 1866 and served in a number of public offices including that of County Auditor.

A legend popularly refers to this house as the "Viceroy's Palace". This attribution is due to many factors but most notably the murals which formerly decorated the sala. The large trees painted on the wall extended into the ceiling cloth and gave rise to the legend that the viceroy had them painted in order to carry out justice under a tree as was supposedly required by Spanish law. This legend has no basis in fact since the Viceroy never came near El Paso much less San Elizario. A likely explanation is that since Jose Ignacio Ronquillo, the first documented owner of the house served as the "alcalde" of San Elizario in the 1830's, that he might have been respectfully addressed as "governor", or some similar title. This could have led his house to become known as "The Governor's Mansion", which is similar to "Viceroy's Palace" (Porter, p. 49). A secondary claim that this was the Presidio Captain's house would also appear invalid, since at present the property cannot be traced beyond 1882 and none of the owners of the house proper had anything to do with the Presidio. It is not entirely impossible that Don Rafael Corona or one of his predecessors had been associated with the Presidio and had built a house outside the Presidio walls, there is however at present, no way to either prove or disprove this theory since none of the early documents of San Elizario is available.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views - HABS photographs of 1936, newspaper photographs 1944, 1959, 1963 and 1968.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary Sources:

Deeds of El Paso County, County of El Paso
Book A, pp. 218-224
Book #995, pp. 392.
Book #928, pp. 195, pp. 220
Book #772, pp. 3

Book #449, pp. 139

Book #164, pp. 113

Emory, William, Map of the Boundary between the United States and Mexico, (surveyed), 1855.

b. Secondary Sources - newspaper articles & book.

El Paso World News. "Controversy Rages

Over Governor's Mansion location in San Elizario", May 17, 1936.

El Paso Herald Post. "Former Vice-Regal Mansion Built 261 Years Ago Is Sold", Sept, 29, 1944

"Landmarks Group Observes Acquiring 'Viceroy's Palace'", March 25, 1968.

"Legends of Old Spain are founded in ancient San Elizario 'Palace'", May 2, 1980 (Jack Hawkins).

"Noises Worry San Elizarians", November 1, 1935.

"Painted Tree Dates to 1877", August 6, 1963.

"Was San Elizario Painting Emblem of Pomp, Power?", July 24, 1963 (Virginia Turner).

"Was Tree Painted for Legal Reasons?", June 19, 1959 (Jane Pemberton).

Porter, Eugene Oliver, San Elizario: A History. Austin: Pemberton Press, 1973.

3. Interviews:

Anita Garcia, July 20, 1980 - resident of house c. 1915-1918, able to confirm floor plan, provide information about grounds.

Rex Gerald, July 20, 1980 - information about typical presidios of the period and discussion of probable arrangement of San Elizario Presidio.

Shirley Haygood, August 6, 1980 - excellent source of descriptions of the house as it formerly stood, confirmation of tentative plan of the house, additional information and description of interior features, her parents owned the house from 1944 to 1949.

W. H. Timmons - professor of History at University of Texas at El Paso, a good source for the pre-American periods of El Paso history.

Virginia Turner - abstract of title to the property,.

C. E. Waterhouse - architectural drawings of the house; measured drawings of house as it existed in 1966.

4. Likely sources not fully investigated:

The archives of Ciudad Juarez on microfilm at University of Texas at El Paso. 93 reels - uncataloged. Early records of San Elizario Presidio Chapel, location unknown - possibly in the possession of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Durango, Mexico.

Prepared by:

Christine Saurel,
Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
August, 1980

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

While only a single wing of this house remains, in its original state the Ronquillo house constituted a fine example of a large adobe house or "estancia" with a total of eleven rooms and a carriage house surrounding a patio and enclosed by an adobe wall. Of the eleven rooms only five are still standing, but these with their latilla high ceilings, round vigas, and moldings which once held painted canvas cloths suggest the grandeur of the original building.

2. Condition of fabric:

The remaining rooms of the Ronquillo house are in a somewhat deteriorated condition having been stripped of all their doors, windows and shutters as well as having lost all trace of painted ceiling cloths, mantals, and decorative wall paintings.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions:

107' - 4 3/4 along the north elevation
19' - 4" along the west elevation
107' - 4 3/4 along the south elevation
19' - 9 1/4" along the east elevation

2. Foundations: None. (A concrete collar has been placed around the base of the structure in addition to a concrete sidewalk on all sides).
3. Wall construction finish and color: Adobe brick with white washed portland cement stucco.
4. Structural system, framing: Round cottonwood vigas with some commercial sawn board vigas, used in repairs to the load-bearing adobe.
5. Chimneys: There are two brick chimneys both damaged- one has been filled in on the west wall, and a larger central chimney between the two easternmost rooms.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: All doors have been removed. On the north facade a large opening shows evidence of a classical doorway with transom. A similar opening exists opposite it on the south facade and led from the zaguan entry hall to the patio. The remaining doorway treatments on those doors leading from the bedrooms and the sala (living room), to the patio are of a simpler, pedimented style.
 - b. Windows and shutters: All windows and shutters are missing, although there is evidence that shutters existed. These shutters could be folded back into decorative wooden moldings to the sides of the windows. Some of these moldings remain with traces of green and red paint.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Flat terrado roof, with a thin layer of concrete as covering. The roof is in extremely deteriorated condition. The cement covering has broken up and there are numerous holes in the roof. Structural repairs to roof are of sawn board vigas.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: A decorative coping of red fired brick caps the adobe parapet which completes the walls. The coping consists of four courses of brick, from bottom to top consisting of a course of headers, a course of saw-tooth bricks and two courses of stretchers.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The house consists of five rooms entered through the central room, the zaguan. Upon entering two rooms are visible to the right, originally used as bedrooms, the farthest in later years was converted to a kitchen. To the left is the great "sala," known for its now-missing murals and ceiling cloth, and beyond the "sala," a third small bedroom. This is an excellent example of a "zaguan" plan in which rooms lead off from the sides of an entry hall.
2. Flooring: Concrete poured over the original dirt floor. In the zaguan, the concrete has been tinted red.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are covered with grey portland cement stucco. The ceilings are exposed vigas and latillas throughout except in the zaguan and the easternmost room in which commercial sawn boards replace cottonwood vigas
4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: No doors remain, the doorways show framing in painted pine, now painted white, but vandals have exposed some original vivid paint colors underneath. These doorways, while very simple, had arched panels over the doors as ornamentation.
5. Hardware: No hardware remains on the building, however, the original key to the front door is in the possession of Mrs. Shirley Haygood of El Paso.
6. Notable original furniture: Mrs. Shirley Haygood claims to have some pieces which date back to the Ellis period of the house which were in the house when purchased by her parents in 1944.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house sits on .09917 acres of land, facing the Acequia Madre and adjacent to the San Elizario Lateral. To the rear is a large cotton field which covers the site of the original orchards as well as the now missing six rooms, patio, portal, and stables.
2. Outbuildings: No outbuildings remain, although a small three room house once existed to the rear of the main structure.

Prepared by:

Christine Saurel,
Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
El Paso, Texas
August, 1980

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the Jose Ignacio Ronquillo House in San Elizario Texas, was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), National Architectural and Engineering Record (NAER), of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS) in cooperation with the West Texas Council of Government. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect, the documentation was conducted by Project Supervisor Paul D. Dolinsky (HABS Washington, D.C. office), Project Historians Christine Saurel (Columbia University) and Christopher S. Witmer (The Pennsylvania State University), Architectural Foreman Dwight H. Burns (Texas University), Architectural Technicians Ann Louise Barr (University of Arizona), Barry Gill (North Dakota State University), Thomas M. Hocker (The Catholic University of America), and Sandra L. Sherrill (Auburn University), and Architectural Photographer David J. Kaminsky.

ADDENDUM TO
CASA RONQUILLO
(Viceroy's Palace)
(Viceregal House)
(El Palacio)
SE of San Elizario Plaza
San Elizario
El Paso County
Texas

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